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ABSTRACT

In April 1997, the American Association of Community Colleges surveyed 1,450 community college presidents in order to find out the state of race and ethnic relations and diversity programming in community colleges. Respondents were asked to identify their campus climate, along a five-point scale, as "contentious" or "harmonious," and also to indicate the extent to which their campuses administer policies and programs that may affect institutional climate. Among the major findings were: (1) 57% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the importance of diversity programming in promoting participation and success of diverse groups of students; (2) more "harmonious" campuses tended to be large (more than 30,000 students), or located in rural areas, in southern regions, with higher percentages of minority students or faculty; (3) over 90% of responding institutions had grievance procedures for students, administrators, faculty, and staff to seek recourse for harassment based on racial or ethnic identity; (4) nearly four-fifths of respondents had student organizations that sponsor cultural events at least monthly, but less than half of the institutions use public forums to discuss race relations on a monthly basis; (5) 62% of respondents had a college official assigned to monitor on-campus race relations; (6) 59% of participating institutions offer credit courses that address ethnic and race relations, but only 35% offer noncredit courses in this subject. Tables illustrate the rating of campus climate at participating community colleges. (AS)

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American Association of Community Colleges

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AACC
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RESEARCH BRIEF

AACC-RB-99-2

CAMPUS CLIMATE

Campus Climate: Perceptions, Policies and Programs in Community Colleges

By Arnold Madison Kee

Executive Summary

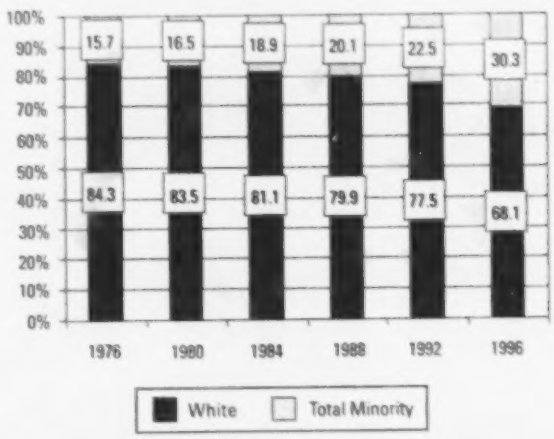
To find out about the state of race and ethnic relations and diversity programming in community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges surveyed 1,450 community college presidents in April 1997. Respondents were asked to identify their campus climate, along a five-point scale, as "contentious" or "harmonious." Harmoniousness was considered to mean free from ethnic and racial bias, or indicative of a campus where all people participate in campus life without fear. Respondents also indicated the extent to which their campuses administer policies and programs that may affect institutional climate.

Major Findings

Most community college respondents considered their campuses to be harmonious. Most also were engaged in activities that suggest institutional support for diversity. Among the major findings:

- Fifty-seven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that diversity programming was a way to promote participation and success of diverse groups of students.
- More "harmonious" campuses tended to be large (more than 30,000 students), or to be located in rural areas, to be located in southern regions, or to have higher percentages of minority students or faculty.
- More than 90 percent of the responding institutions had grievance procedures for students, administrators, faculty, and staff to seek recourse for harassment based on racial or ethnic identity.
- Nearly four-fifths of respondents had student organizations that sponsor cultural events at least monthly, but less than half of the institutions use public forums to discuss race relations on a monthly basis.
- Sixty-two percent of the respondents had a college official assigned to monitor race relations on campus.
- Fifty-nine percent of responding institutions offer credit courses that address ethnic and race relations, but only 35 percent offer noncredit courses on this subject.

Trends in Community College Minority Enrollment: 1976–1996



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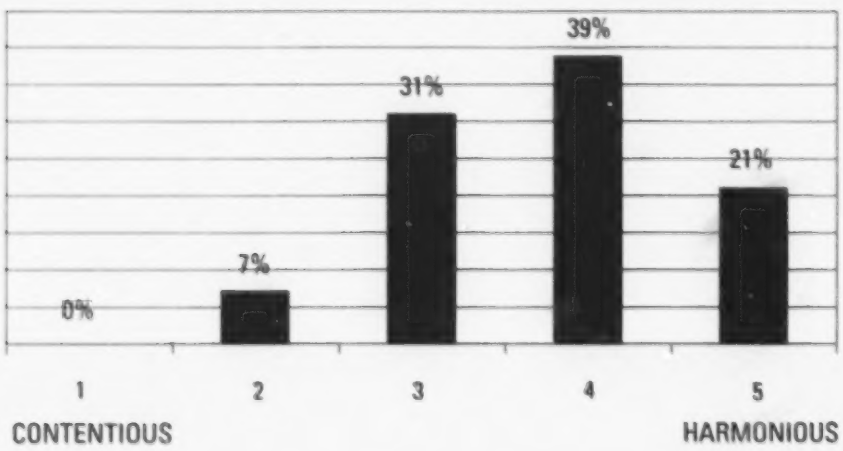
Methodology

To assess race and ethnic relations and diversity programming at community colleges, AACC sur-veyed 1,450 community college administrators. Chief executive officers receiving the mail survey were asked to forward it to the campus official primarily responsible for assuring diversity at their institutions. In most cases, the presidents themselves responded; other respondents included affirmative action officers, deans and diversity program coordinators. The survey instrument was designed to capture information in seven areas related to diversity practices: mission statement, institutional policies, student activities, community involvement, curriculum, campus dialogues on race, and the use of diversity programming. Respondents were asked to categorize their campus climate along a five-point "contentious-to-harmonious" scale. A total of 360 community colleges replied. Although the overall response rate of 25 percent was low, the demographic composition of the respondents was similar to the composition of community colleges in general.

Findings

Overall, respondents found their campuses to be relatively harmonious. Sixty percent ranked their campus as either a 4 or 5 on the five-point scale. The survey results were then used to assess campus climate in relation to institutional size, locale, and the percentage of minority students and faculty on campus.

Rating of Campus Climate at Community Colleges



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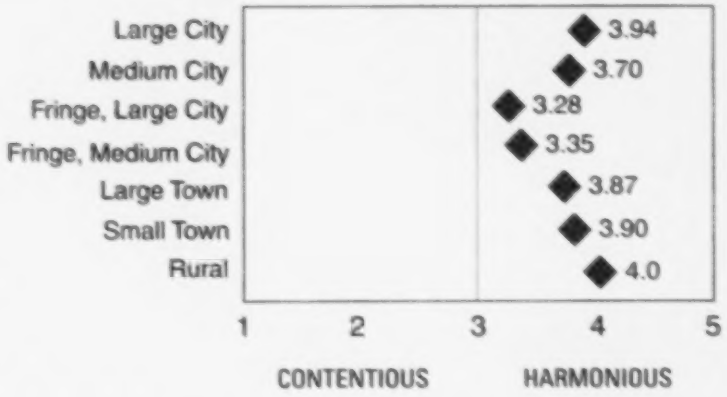
Locale

Respondents from the most rural and the most urban institutions tended to report that their campuses were more harmonious; those in between reported less harmony.

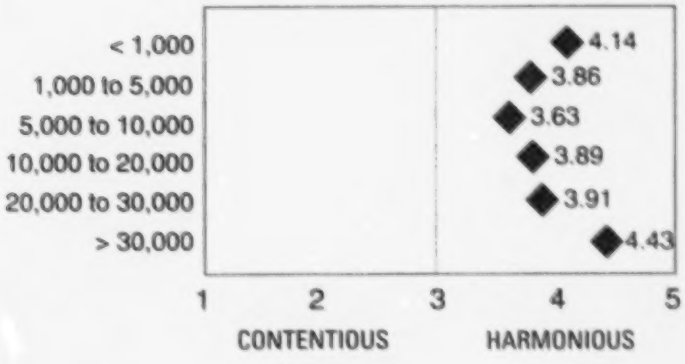
Climate Assessment by Institutional Locale



Size

Size seemed to be a factor in campus climate. Institutions with fewer than 1,000 students or more than 30,000 students ranked their campuses as the most harmonious.

Climate Assessment by Institutional Size



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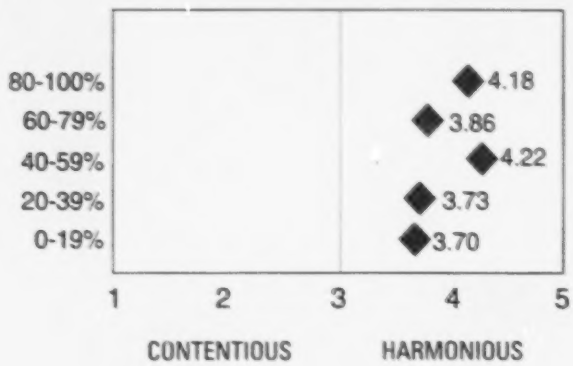
Presence of Minority Students and Faculty

There appears to be a relationship between administrator perceptions of campus climate and minority faculty or student presence. Colleges with a higher minority presence tended to have a more positive climate. Campuses with less than 20 percent minority student enrollment reported having the least harmonious campuses, but those with at least 40 percent minority student enrollment reported the most harmony.

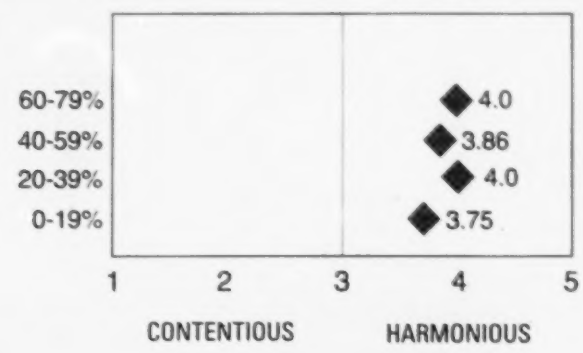
Climate Assessment by Minority Student Percentage



Similarly, institutions where minority faculty comprise less than 20 percent of the professoriate reported the less harmonious campuses. Institutions with more than 60 percent minority faculty reported more harmonious climates.

Locale appears to be a factor in minority presence in community colleges. The highest percentages of minority faculty and students are on campuses in large cities. The lowest percentages are in large towns, which have an average of 3 percent minority faculty and 9 percent minority students.

Climate Assessment by Minority Faculty Percentage



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Regional Differences in Climate

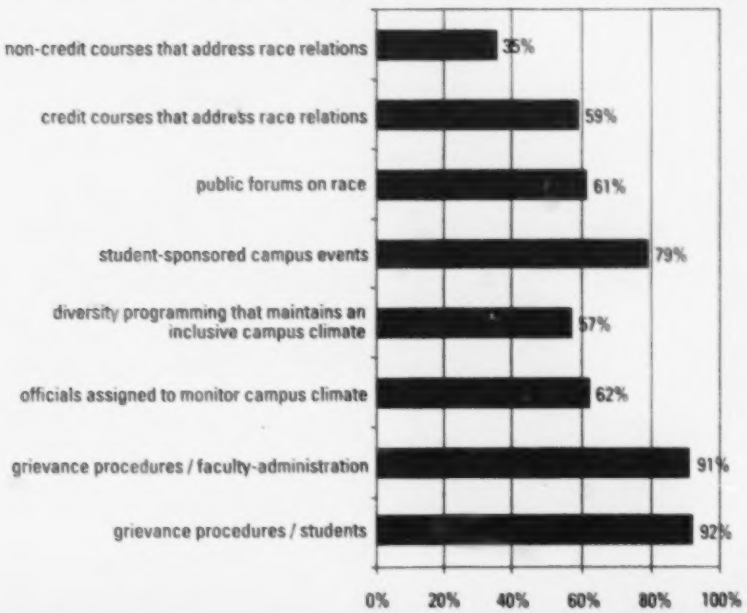
Institutions in the South (Southwest or Southeast) tended to report having more harmonious campus climates, and those in the Northeast less harmonious climates. Campuses in the Midwest and Northwest fell in the middle.

Climate Assessment by Region

Policies and Programs

In addition to perceptions of campus climate, the survey gathered information on college policies and programs that might be related to diversity and a positive climate. Responding campuses were most likely to have grievance procedures for faculty and students, and least likely to offer noncredit courses that address ethnic and race relations. The existence of grievance procedures may not be surprising since they could have been put in place for reasons other than race or ethnic relations.

Community Colleges with Programs & Policies Related to Diversity



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Administrators contacted by AACC in a follow-up telephone survey offered the following suggestions for ensuring positive race and ethnic relations and campus climates:

- ❖ Foster the participation of minority students in extra-curricular activities.
- ❖ Monitor the quality of classroom interaction between faculty and students.
- ❖ Monitor the state of race relations in the surrounding community.
- ❖ Analyze socioeconomic class differences in addition to race and ethnic differences when comparing student experiences on campus.
- ❖ Promote diversity and minority representation at all levels of the institution.
- ❖ Establish or enhance multicultural centers on campus to bolster cross-cultural learning.
- ❖ Create faculty development "academies" that provide multicultural training while conferring scholastic distinction.

Conclusions

According to the presidents and other administrators who responded to this survey, community college racial and ethnic relations appear to be harmonious. Although they also implement programs and policies that promote diversity, it is difficult to measure the role that such programming played in each campus' climate. Based on a cross-section of the responses, the data suggest that institutions considered most harmonious were also more likely to have diversity-supportive policies.

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Bureau of Justice statistics- *http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/cscvca.htm*

FBI Uniform Crime Report-*http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hateinfo.htm*

Demographic information- *http://www.census.gov/*

Sacramento College's Campus Climate Survey *http://wserver.scc.losrios.cc.ca.us/~sccro/climate.html*

San Jose State University Campus Climate Homepage *http://www.sjsu.edu/campus_climate/*

Agencies and Organizations that assist in the improvement of campus climate

Community Relations Service , U.S. Department of Justice, 600 E Street, NW, Suite 2000, Washington, DC 20530. *http://www.usdoj.gov/crs/crs.htm*

Study Circles Resources Center, 697 Pomfret Street, Pomfret, CT 06258

Center for Living Democracy, 289 Fox Farm Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301

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